

## **Turning the Tables**

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The first few months of a deployment can be hectic as new missions are conducted and units get used to their new battle space and living conditions. Not surprisingly, as units enter a new area of operations, there is usually a steady increase in mishaps. Over time, though, experience is gained and controls are put in place to prevent accidents, which begin to taper off. Unfortunately, as redeployment nears, there is a tendency for accidents and fatalities to increase again. This ends up costing lives, results in injuries and damaged equipment and detracts from the mission.

What types of accidents do we most frequently see during a deployment? During Operation Iraqi Freedom I, the 4th Infantry Division experienced a spike in Army Motor Vehicle and Army Combat Vehicle mishaps, as well as in personnel injuries. The primary cause for vehicle accidents during deployment is the same as back home in the States—excessive speed or driving too fast for conditions. Collisions, rollovers and hitting dismounted troops are some of the subcategory types of AMV and ACV accidents experienced. Motor vehicle accidents are also the largest fatality-producing category of accidents.

Personnel injury accidents include falls, such as from vehicles and buildings; sporting activities and physical training; maintenance and material handling; and improper use of electricity. Though this category may sound less dangerous, many personnel injury accidents result in fatalities or permanent injuries. The root causes of these accidents are overconfidence, rushing or becoming complacent about everyday hazards such as climbing on their vehicles or moving heavy equipment.

So what can Soldiers do to prevent the late-deployment accident spike? For starters, they need to be aware of the root causes. The primary reason for late-term accidents is complacency or being too comfortable while performing dangerous jobs. This usually is caused when a Soldier has successfully performed a job or operated a potentially dangerous piece of equipment for months without a mishap. The Soldier becomes experienced in that task and believes he is now an expert. This often leads to Soldiers subconsciously downplaying hazards they're aware of rather than giving them the healthy respect they should. Unfortunately, this attitude can lull Soldiers into a false sense of security and cause them to take shortcuts, to be overconfident or to do things too quickly. The result is Soldiers having accidents they never thought would happen to them.

To counter complacency and avoid downplaying hazards, Soldiers should think about how they, their section and their unit can fight this dangerous mindset during deployment. They must turn the tables and use the knowledge and experience they've gained to make the job safer—or "Murphy-proof"—if possible. The knowledge gained over time while deployed also can be used to fight the very complacency it breeds.

Overconfidence and getting too comfortable with a job are real threats to Soldiers. However, Soldiers can counter these dangerous attitudes by using what they've learned and enforcing standards so history isn't repeated. By attacking a problem using these and other tactics, a Soldier increases the odds of safely completing a long deployment tour. Flattening out the late-deployment accident spike is a battle we can all win.